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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on foreign language instruction in the community colleges of Florida. A brief rationale for increasing the importance given to language instruction is followed by a review of the literature concerning the latest classroom and laboratory foreign language techniques such as computers, video taping and analysis, audio tape improvement, relaxation techniques, and classroom improvement techniques. Next, community college language programs in Florida are discussed, based on coversations with language instructors at Santa Fe Community College, Miami-Dade Community College (MDCC), St. Petersburg Junior College and Florida Junior College. The next section provides a more detailed look at the activities of MDCC's Foreign Language Task Force. Concluding comments stress that: (1) the key to success in teaching foreign languages lies in the classroom; (2) resources should be allocated to faculty development and new hiring; (3) MDCC's Language Task Force is likely to influence and benefit Florida's language programs; and (4) better lines of communication between community colleges and universities should be developed. (LAL)

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Foreign Language Instruction In Florida Community Colleges

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to report on foreign language instruction in the community colleges of Florida. The paper addresses this issue through several strategies. The first part is a brief rationale for increasing the importance given to language instruction. The second part is a review of the literature concerning the latest classroom and laboratory foreign language techniques. The following section discusses conversations between this researcher and various language instructors. The fourth section involves Miami Dade Community College's Language Task Force project. The closing section summarizes the author's observations during this research.

Rationale

There is a noticeable lack of literature in the community college journals concerning foreign language instruction. The most appropriate material found was in one particular issue of the Community and Junior College Journal (Gollattscheck, 1984-85). This publication was devoted entirely to international programs and foreign students in community colleges.

The purpose of the issue was to address the role of community colleges in international affairs. Such roles include teaching English to foreign students, teaching foreign languages to American students, leading overseas programs and educating businessman in international trade. These are just a few of the ways such schools are involved in cross-cultural programs.

As Americans are increasingly called upon to interact with other cultures, schools will inevitably increase their involvement in foreign programs. In my opinion, the aforementioned journal issue is a statement to colleges and their communities to increase their attention to such matters.

In an article called "Bilingual Education: Challenge for the Community College", Pio DeCano (1981) paraphrases two points made by Clark Kerr. The first of these states that "...global perspectives need to be added to all relevant courses and fields. 'We live in an increasingly polycentric world, but American higher education for the past two decades has been becoming more ethnocentric in its endeavors."

The second point concerns the increasing enrollment of minority students in community colleges. Kerr predicts that twenty-five percent of college-age youth will be from minority communities by the year 2000. Kerr asserts that this poses a challenge to providing these students with access to postsecondary training.

Regardless of these trends, school systems are changing, and for the most part restricting, their curricula to include what can be called 'the basics'. Florida has chosen to include foreign languages as basic to general education. Four year universities will soon be requiring two high school years, or two college semesters, of instruction in a foreign language (Jester, 1985). This is likely to increase the number of language courses offered by community colleges. As a result these institutions may choose to improve their language programs through innovative teaching techniques or by assessing the quality of present instructional methods.

The following section discusses some of the literature found in foreign language journals. The articles range in subject matter from an analysis of foreign language student characteristics to the use of computers in the language lab. While many of the innovative techniques may not be presently employed in Florida community colleges, it is likely that instructors will be interested in the methods and techniques that are available.

Innovation in Foreign Language Instruction

1. Computers

The majority of articles to be reviewed in this section are from the Foreign Language Annals. Beginning with the February 1985 issue, the annals reflect the amount of computerization taking place in foreign language instruction by devoting an entire section of each issue to the subject of computerized foreign language instruction. The purpose of this section is to present reviews of software and discuss problems and viewpoints of computer-assisted instruction (CAI).

The first issue offers a review of what is available to the teacher in this field. Robert Hart (Hart and Garrett, Eds., 1985) indicates that integrated packages of microcomputer software are hard to find. Most diskettes consist of several games or drills concerning vocabulary building or grammar. Most are designed to supplement the classroom or test rather than replace them. Almost none accompany texts. Thus a collection of supplementary material is not likely to be cohesive.

The courseware varies in quality and sophistication. Drills are the most common but several games are described. One called TERRORISTE simulates a contest between French police and terrorists. While this is probably an 'attention grabber', I feel this topic defeats the purpose of trying to instill cultural fluency upon today's students. Two others which involve simulated furniture moving and a fantasy adventure seem more acceptable. Hart indicates however, that grammar and vocabulary are determined by the context of the game and can be rather arbitrary. Some use an 'artificial intelligence' approach and require the student to formulate or answer questions regarding a specified situation.

One system called DASHER (Hart & Garrett, 1985 and Hope, 1982) allows teachers to put their own material into the program. Simple drills can be created and corrected. These, however, are rather unsophisticated and have an inflexible format. According to Hart, technical standards have improved lately increasing accent and non-Roman alphabet capabilities. Graphics have also brought a more marketable dimension to such lessons although content and student interaction capabilities are rarely improved.

Most software fails in providing adequate diagnosis and feedback of errors. A typical response is "no" accompanied by the correct answer. One of the supposed benefits of computer learning is the capability of providing the student with an immediate response. Simplistic answers negate such benefits. Hart asserts that computers should be able to differentiate between errors in spelling, accent, and grammar as well as provide some explanation. In addition they should store information to assess the general strengths and weaknesses of the student.

According to Hart the state-of-the-art will improve quickly and more comprehensive packages will soon be available. Recent developments in hardware have made interactive computer laboratories possible. An interactive micro-based language lesson will select and play audio and video pieces in addition to recording the students voice as in more traditional language laboratory facilities. Micro-video lessons such as MONTEVIDISCO are now available. This program is an interactive tour of a Mexican town. As micro-computers become more powerful they will be able to accommodate systems that were formerly featured only by mainframe computers.

Hart requests that instructors review these teaching tools for the benefit of other teachers and software designers. He mentions several review criteria that are appropriate for rating computerized lessons. These include the interactivity, intelligence, human factoring and documentation of CAI systems. Comments regarding these capabilities will help the foreign language courseware to mature beyond its infant state.

2. Video Taping and Analysis

Both video taping and video analysis are currently being used to improve foreign language instruction. In an article called "The Videotape Recorder in Foreign Language Conversation and Composition Courses", George Buehler (1982) of Mississippi State University writes of his experiences using videotape records in his advanced German classes. He gives small groups of students the assignment of choosing a dialogue, memorizing is and acting it out in front of the camera. After several 'takes' the students choose the best one and show it to the rest of the class. The videos are shown several times and then critiqued. Buehler says the students perceive these projects as creative achievements as well as assignments.

Viewing the tapes several times improves familiarity with and comprehension of the dialog. The tape is critiqued bit-by-bit to correct pronunciation, intonation, rhythm and speech patterns. Students are then asked to substitute phrases within the dialog through the use of other expressions. This serves to increase vocabulary. The video is repeated several more times and finally the students are asked to rewrite the entire dialog using alternative phrasing.

In more advanced assignments the students were asked to write their own dialogs. These included such titles as "Our First Date", "Father Knows Best", "It's Miller Time" and "Experiences with a German Landlady". These

were refined, taped and then critiqued. The final assignment involved video-taping a mock press conference. One person was chosen to be a celebrity and the rest of the class played the parts of reporters. This was quite challenging as it required spontaneous responses to unknown questions.

According to Buehler the taping experience is challenging, motivating and builds confidence in students. Learning and retention rates are high and the technique facilitates critiquing. In addition it is enjoyable and can be used to show beginning language students the future benefits of their present efforts.

I personally found this article to be quite interesting. It offers a unique combination of creativity, practice, critique and student-teacher interaction. I think it is a very appropriate and innovative use of technology in language instruction.

Another use of video-tapes is described by Sture E. Svensson (1985) in an article called "Video, Authenticity, and Language for Special Purposes Teaching (LSP)". The author is a Swedish professor who teaches English to secondary technical students. The tapes used are American made and concern American culture and technology. They are obtained through such companies as IBM, SHELL and VOLVO or through television stations. The benefits of their use include the following:

1. showing of facial expressions and gestures
2. presenting current events
3. capability of stopping or repeating a scene
4. introducing the student to a variety of voices.

The LSP videos can be geared toward a specific subject in order to familiarize the student with the language of that technology. This technique would be useful in the language classes sponsored by the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) at the University of Florida. These classes

teach French or Spanish to professors and students who plan to work as agricultural specialists in West Africa or Latin America. Video tapes of the countries to be visited would be helpful in learning about culture and business in addition to the language.

A third application of videotaping to foreign language instruction is described in "French Accent through Video Analysis" (Ecklund and Wiese, 1981). By recording and analyzing the speech of beginning French students on video tape, accents are quickly improved. Less sophisticated methods of accent analysis have involved the use of mirrors and audio tape. Ecklund and Wiese find the video tapes to be more motivating, better for critiquing purposes and serve as a permanent record of student improvement.

3. Audio Tape Improvement

As a means of reducing the drudgery associated with audio language tapes, Bruce I. Turner (1985) of the University of New Hampshire suggest "Soap in the Language Lab". Turner wrote his own version of a soap opera and recorded it on audio tape. The 'soap' consisted of weekly episodes each containing approximately thirty new vocabulary words. Students were tested for comprehension at the end of each episode. At the end of the course the students were required to write their own version of the soap's ending. Turner found the technique to be a fun and successful teaching tool. Students were stimulated and intrigued by the creativity of their instructor.

In my opinion this is an excellent technique to spark students' interest. It shows Turner's dedication to teaching and respect for students. Alternative story lines could be used by those who perceive of 'soaps' as sub-standard teaching materials.

4. Relaxation Techniques

H. Thompson Fillmer's (1982-83) article entitled the "Super-learning of Vocabulary", discusses a learning technique developed by Dr. Georgi Lozanov, a Bulgarian psychiatrist. The technique uses rhythm, breathing, music and meditative techniques to bring out hypermnesia or 'super memory'. Lozanov discovered that students could learn the meanings of 3,000 words per day (in their native language). Fillmer evaluated Lozanov's technique by applying it to the instruction of vocabulary words in a classroom situation. He taught 400 words in less than ninety minutes and found retention rates to be good. He considers the method effective and suggests further research of it for future applications.

W. Jane Bancroft's (1982) article concerns the learning techniques of Suggestopedia and Sophrology. Suggestopedia uses a combination of yoga, relaxation and verbal suggestion to teach foreign languages. She attributes its development to Lozanov. At the same time Sophrology, based on Eastern techniques as well as hypnosis, verbal suggestion and autogenic therapy, was developed by Alfonso Caycedo in Barcelona. Both methods evolved in the 1960's.

Bancroft has applied a combination of the techniques to the French language classroom. She determined that memory increased along with student motivation. She suggests that these methods be used to improve foreign language instruction.

5. Improving the Classroom

Two final articles to be reviewed caught my attention because of their focus on the non-traditional student. Although neither author is associated with a community college, their topics refer to students who

are common to such institutions. Indeed the non-traditional age student is the rule rather than the exception in modern community colleges.

The first of these publications is called "The Continuing Education Student and the Study of Foreign Languages". Its author, Mary Ann Reiss (1982), conducted a survey of continuing education students concerning personal characteristics that related to foreign language instruction. Reiss found that the students who were taking foreign language classes were highly practical in their approach and wanted reasons for taking the course. In addition they thought the knowledge gained would benefit them in the the future and wanted more culture and conversation to be included.

Although it is not directly related to innovation in instruction, this article alludes to the issue of requiring foreign languages in higher education programs. Regardless of age students are likely to be responsive if there are practical as well as philosophical reasons for taking a course. Study of a foreign language is useless if it cannot be applied to life outside the classroom. Classes need to take on a practical, cultural approach in addition to teaching basic grammar. Discussions of restaurants, stores, travel situations, sports and even libraries can be stimulating as well as useful to students. It is more useful to speak well in two or three tenses than to merely read well in all tenses of a foreign language. In my opinion grammar should mix with conversation and not overshadow it.

This conversational approach seems to be taking hold in the modern foreign language classroom, In an article entitled "A Lively Class Session for the Adult Education Second-Language Course", Dana Carton (1983) describes such an approach. The lesson involves numbers, a basic knowledge requirement in any language. The instructor begins by asking students their ages. In an adult education class the ages will range thus increasing the range of

numbers used. Other questions involve counting the number of classmates, guessing the instructor's age, and identifying each person by a number. A sheet with the numbers and translation can be passed out if students have no prior knowledge of them.

The second part of the lesson involves the card game "Go Fish". Students must ask for cards from each other by number and through the use of basic conversation. Simple grammatical concept can be introduced here. In addition to being useful this technique is lively, involves everyone and can be modified for different types of students.

I have observed IFAS French instructors using similar techniques to teach numbers. The methods were quite effective. A big advantage is the amount of student involvement. The more active the student is in the learning process, the more he or she will get out of the lesson. (Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education, 1984).

The next two sections of this paper describe my conversations with various language instructors and administrators. Many of the techniques mentioned in the preceding literature review are currently being employed in Florida's community colleges.

Community College Language Programs

In order to assess foreign language instruction in Florida's community colle , I conducted interviews with staff members, instructors, and/or administrators at the following schools: Santa Fe Community College (SFCC), Miami-Dade Community College (MDCC), St. Petersburg Junior College (SPJC), Florida Junior College (FJC). All four have programs that center around traditional foreign language classroom instruction. The programs vary in the languages taught, in number and type of courses, and in their methods of supplementing classroom material.

Santa Fe, St. Petersburg and Florida Junior College all have language lab facilities equipped with audio tape players. These tapes expand upon classroom material and have the capability of recording the student's response. Thus the student can play the tape back and compare his or her answer with the correct response (Jester, 1985; Couto, 1985, Wilson, 1985; and Florida Junior College, 1985). The tape players at St. Petersburg Community College are located within the language department while the others have separate media lab facilities.

Miami-Dade's program varies from the others in several ways. First, the number of languages offered and number of courses taught far exceeds those of the other schools. In addition the courses were not solely operated out of the classroom. The Survival Spanish course consists of video and/or audio tapes that can be used by those, such as handicapped, who cannot come to the classroom to learn (Parraga, 1985).

The main difference, however, rests in Miami-Dade's concern with researching and implementing innovative programs through the Foreign Language Task Force (Paiva, 1985). The Task Force was implemented by MDCC president Robert McCabe and is the top

priority project for Miami-Dade for the next two years (Vitale, 1985). The force is directed by Robert Vitale, a French professor who is also in charge of all overseas programs at the school. The next section of this paper describes the Task Force and my interview with Dr. Vitale in detail.

Although Miami-Dade has the most up-to-date and innovative program the other colleges also appear to have quality instruction. I spoke with several instructors at Santa Fe to determine reasons for their success.

Irene Cunningham (1985) asserts that the key to foreign language instruction lies in the classroom. Language laboratories can supplement the classwork but personal contact between the student and teacher is crucial to the student's success. Cunningham is from Morocco and teaches French full-time at Santa Fe. She thinks that Santa Fe has the best French program in the state. Her results are so good that students who transfer to the University of Florida after taking French I are advised to dual enroll and complete their language instruction at the community college. Cunningham states that students who complete French 3 are three to four months away from fluency.

Very little English is used in Cunningham's conversational approach to teaching. She uses English mainly to back up statements concerning grammar in order to insure student comprehension. Grammar is spread throughout the three courses rather than concentrated at the beginning. According to Cunningham it is better to have conversational command of a few tenses than have written capabilities with all tenses. By the end of the first year student grammar is good.

Students increase vocabulary and speaking ability through the use of dialogs. Students do not memorize them but build upon them substituting new words and phrases into the original conversation. Cunningham is strict

on attendance and downgrades after several absences. Most students enjoy coming to class and want to learn.

The language lab is mandatory for foreign language students and they receive one credit for completing the assignments. All three Santa Fe instructors that I spoke with (Couto, 1985; Cunningham, 1985 and Pierret, 1985) agree that the lab helps a lot if used regularly. Manuel Couto (1985) a full time Spanish instructor confirmed that the lab merely backs up the instructor. He states that Santa Fe's lab does not have the facilities he would like. Lack of funding however prohibits expansion or innovation in this area. Humanities department head, Sue Jester (1985), states that a new building is needed before such facilities can be improved.

Paula Pierret, a part-time French instructor, discussed the issue of requiring students to take a foreign language. About half of her students take the class because it is required. They have little interest in learning language. Such students lower the level of enthusiasm in the class. She has to force these students to talk. Pierret "deplores" this requirement at Santa Fe. She also describes problems with the language laboratory. Tapes are often worn out and they proceed too quickly. Consistent use of the tapes however is reflected by good grades on tests. Pierret emphasizes that students must attend the lab from the very beginning or they will be lost later on.

Pierret prefers teaching the older, continuing education students. These students are interested in a practical approach to French for the purposes of travelling or 'brushing up' on their skills. A conversational approach is employed and students deal with real-life situations by practicing dialogs that concern hotels, restaurants and airports.

Janet Wilson (1985) of St. Petersburg Junior College confirmed the benefits of using a conversational approach to teach languages. Wilson described successful intensive courses taught during the summer to county language teachers.

A staff member at Florida Junior College (1985) General Studies department said that the college was in the process of improving their language programs because of the new Florida requirement. These changes include the adding of new languages to the curriculum. FJC currently has language lab facilities at all four of its campuses.

Miami-Dade's Foreign Language Task Force

Miami-Dade's Language Task Force has been formed for the purpose of making the college a major center for the study of foreign languages. According to Robert Vitale (1985) the project is divided into three areas of research and development. These include technology, methodology and cross-cultural studies and community services. Serving as director of the project, Vitale says the new center will serve the business community as well as the university parallel language courses.

Members of the Task Force are currently traveling to existing centers of language instruction located within the United States and in other countries. These include such places as the Defense Language Institute, Center for Applied Linguistics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Faculty are also attending conferences sponsored by such organizations as the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Specific subjects of research include self-instructional linguistics, computer methods and video instruction.

As of January 1986, computerized Tandberg media laboratories will be operational at all three MDCC campuses. These labs have interactive systems capable of accessing video and audio tapes that are used to supplement classroom instruction. The Task Force is also looking into other laboratory types such as the 'open-lab' system at the University of Maryland. Miami-Dade hopes to be able to access satellite television programs from foreign countries for use in the classroom.

MDCC currently offers courses in English as a Second Language (ESL), French, Spanish, Italian, German, Hebrew, Russian and Portuguese. Future courses will include Arabic, Japanese and Chinese as well as many other languages that will be offered through self-instruction.

Intensive Spanish classes are currently being taught at Miami-Dade. These classes meet five nights a week, three hours per night and are limited to twenty people. The cost is $440.00 and students receive twelve credits for it. The monotony of the three hours is broken by having three different instructors each night. This semester the instructors are from Argentina, Cuba and Guatemala. In this way students are also introduced to three different accents. Vitale says this class has the lowest attrition rate of any class at Miami-Dade.

Semesters abroad are offered in the countires of Greece, France, England, Spain and Italy. A new program offers a semester in 'little Havanna' within Miami. These are goal oriented programs and students are motivated to work hard during the year so they will qualify for the spring semester 'abroad'. The school also offers a semester at the college in which students study only language.

A major reason for instituting the Task Force is to deal with business issues. Miami is becoming an increasingly international city. Business people need to know how to behave in a foreign cultural setting. For example: French people never discuss business at a meal and Japanese people never say no because it is impolite. Knowledge of such rules can be crucial to business deals.

According to Vitale Miami-Dade has large numbers of Latin students studying French and Italian as 'third languages'. Other Latins may want to improve their English and Spanish capabilities. Vitale emphasizes that while many Latins are bilingual in common speech, they need to improve their grammar and diction up to universally acceptable standards. He says the situation is similar for blacks who speak an English dialect that is not acceptable in the business world.

Vitale also discusses some of the reasons for the success of Miami-Dade's language programs. He says that students are interviewed at the end of each semester to test their speaking ability. Teachers must also attend regular seminars and proficiency workshops to keep them inspired. Miami-Dade's willingness to try new ideas, take chances, and spend money for travel helps the schools keep its excellent reputation.

With leaders such as Vitale one can see why Miami-Dade is so successful. Even over the telephone he exudes energy and overflows with information. Vitale has bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Miami and a Ph.D. in medieval French from the University of Maryland. He taught at the University of Miami, the University of Maryland, and at Sanford University prior to his appointment at MDCC. He speaks Italian, French, Spanish and Dutch fluently and is also quite knowledgeable in German.

Vitale says that he took Russian last semester to "...keep my mind alive". One can see quite easily that he and his Foreign Language Task Force are very much alive.

Conclusion

Florida community colleges exhibit a wide range in foreign language instructional techniques. One opinion common to all persons interviewed is that the key to success in teaching foreign languages lies in the classroom. This indicates to me that resources should be allocated towards acquiring new, competent teachers in addition to maintaining and improving the skills of instructors presently teaching foreign language classes. This is not to say that funds should not go toward supplementary laboratory equipment. However, such materials should be carefully evaluated to determine whether or not they are worth the cost.

Several issues are sure to affect foreign language instruction in Florida during the next several years. First of all resources for community colleges are becoming scarce. Language instruction may be affected along with the rest of the curriculum. Second, as a result of the new foreign language requirement, programs may receive some funding increases. Finally, Miami-Dade's Language Task Force is likely to influence Florida language programs in general. The state may even receive national attention in this area. Transfer students from Miami may have better language skills to bring to Universities. In addition Miami-Dade may attract students that formerly would have gone to other schools.

The innovation at Miami-Dade can benefit other Florida language programs. In order for this to happen, however, language departments in community colleges and universities will have to develop better lines of communication.

I was disappointed when I realized that the University of Florida language faculty were totally ignorant of their community college counterparts. Communication within the same city between University of Florida and Santa Fe was non-existent. In addition community college faculty were unaware of language programs at other Florida community colleges.

It seems that faculties would benefit from communication. Sharing information and ideas should be stimulating to departments. And if not for their own stimulation, teachers should be informed of innovation in their field in order to pass the information on to students. Indeed as we improve our cross-cultural understanding we should also examine our 'intra-cultural' characteristics.

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